

Between Brownlow and Magwitch: Sirius Black and the Ruthless Elimination of the Male Protector in the *Harry Potter* Series

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WARNING, SPOILERS: This is an academic article which supposes that the reader is familiar with the complete *Harry Potter* series. Events that give away main plot points are discussed here.

Although no direct influence can be proven, Sirius Black, one of the main secondary characters in J.K. Rowling's world-famous *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007) combines in his characterization intertextual traits that connect him with two key Dickensian secondary characters: John Brownlow in *Oliver Twist* (1837-9) and Abel Magwitch in *Great Expectations* (1860-1). These two male characters are given the role of protecting a young orphaned boy, a role which they share with Sirius, Harry's godfather. Like Brownlow, Sirius is a rich bachelor and also the best friend of the boy's deceased father. Like Magwitch, Sirius is an escaped prisoner, unfairly sentenced for life, who finds himself unable to recover his freedom due to a faulty system of justice and whose redress never reaches him before he dies. The intense mourning which many readers describe in relation to Sirius's strange demise may thus reflect the broken hope that, like Oliver, Pip and other literary orphans, Harry will be rescued by a father figure. Rowling's own systematic destruction of this possibility in her series, with the deaths of Sirius, Dumbledore, Snape and, indeed of James Potter, points towards a feminine, androphobic distrust of the male protector, based on her defence of idealised motherhood.¹

¹ PLEASE, NOTE: This article has been rejected by a variety of English-language scholarly publications for two main reasons: a) peer reviewers found that there are no grounds to compare characters in the works of Dickens and Rowling, and b) they objected to my calling Rowling 'androphobic', finding my approach misogynistic. About the first objection, the obvious answer is that I very clearly announce that even though I cannot prove that Rowling took her inspiration from Dickens, the *intertextual* comparison I establish here seems productive and helpful to understand a number of key issues about Sirius Black and, indeed, the *Harry Potter* series. We often compare very different texts in Literary Studies in many occasions and this is perfectly acceptable scholarship. About the second objection, I am a feminist, as I have proven throughout my career and my personal life, and I feel that I am being censored in my feminist approach to Rowling. As a feminist, I don't believe that sexism is confined to men. If feminist criticism has never shied away from calling a male writer 'sexist', 'male chauvinist' or 'misogynist(ic)' I do not quite see why we cannot expose women's androphobia if we think this is present in their texts. The third objection presented to me, and in quite insulting terms, is that the present article is a very bad piece of scholarship. I would be, then, very grateful for feedback, at least to learn what I should not do next time (please email me: Sara.Martin@uab.cat). Thank you.

KEYWORDS: J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter*, Sirius Black, *Oliver Twist*, *Great Expectations*, male protector, mourning, death, unfair imprisonment

Introduction: Rejecting the Male Protector

Harry Potter is protected throughout his confrontation with Voldemort by the powerful magic generated by the sacrifice of his mother, Lily. James, her husband and Harry's father, also dies trying to protect his family, yet his sacrifice is not equally valued in the series, if at all. The violent deaths of Harry's other male protectors—Albus Dumbledore, Severus Snape, Remus Lupin and his godfather Sirius Black—deprive Harry of an alternative paternal figure.² Like James, but unlike Lily (who appears to have been an ideal woman and mother), all these male characters are revealed to be flawed and, so, inadequate 'fathers' for Harry.

Sirius Black's characterization is particularly controversial. Rowling presents him as Harry's best potential male protector only to undermine relentlessly his fittingness for the role, finally eliminating him. Her treatment of Black even verges on cruelty regarding his bizarre dismissal, the lack of funeral rituals for him and, crucially, the absence of any redress from the Ministry of Magic concerning his unjust incarceration in Azkaban. Rowling seems clearly biased against Harry's male protectors, and particularly against Sirius, because she appears to defend in her series an exclusive, feminine ideology of motherhood, centred on Lily and expressed through other 'good mothers' such as Molly Weasley and even Narcissa Malfoy (Weaver and McMahon-Coleman 2012). This matriarchal ideology is not feminist, at least in relation to the family, although, paradoxically, it echoes some of the worst androphobia of radical feminism in its undervaluing of men as positive role models.

This argument might seem to contradict Heilman and Donaldson's critique of *Harry Potter* as a patriarchal text. Mentioning Black only in passing, they complain that, despite a certain improvement in the last three volumes, "The overall message related to power and gender still conforms to the stereotypical, hackneyed, and sexist patterns of the first four books, which reflect rather than challenge the worst elements of patriarchy" (2008: 140). For them, Rowling's series is "dominated by male characters" (141), portrayed "as wiser, braver, more powerful, and more fun than females" (146), though some boys are also

² Other male victims are Cedric Diggory, Fred Weasley, Alastor Moody and even the house-elf Dobby. Only one woman in the anti-Voldemort faction dies: Nymphadora Tonks.

"stereotypically portrayed" (155). I do agree with Heilman and Donaldson that the female characters are not given enough presence and authority; their partial reading, however, misses crucial gender issues in *Harry Potter*. Rowling is certainly no feminist, yet not all the male characters are given a privileged treatment in her series, quite the opposite. Rowling divides the men in her saga in two groups: the evil patriarchs led by Voldemort, and their opponents, with Harry as their chosen leader. Against what might be expected, the positive male characters (the men who resist the extreme violence of Voldemort and his Death Eaters) actually fare poorly and fail to survive the battle with patriarchal villainy.

I read the series as Rowling's attempt to moderate the violence in the traditional patriarchal confrontation between hero and villain with the inclusion of positive, feminine, family-oriented values: this explains why Harry triumphs without actually murdering Voldemort and why his reward, as the notorious epilogue shows, is a thriving family life. However, in order to enhance Harry's heroism, Rowling takes the questionable decision of destroying all the adult male figures surrounding him (with the only exception of compliant, hen-pecked Arthur Weasley). Her strategy to justify this dubious choice consists of presenting these men, as I have noted, as profoundly defective. Harry's own ideal adult masculinity is, thus, conditioned not at all by male bonding but, rather, by the women surrounding him and, in particular, by the mothers. These range from Lily Potter herself, who provides her son with a peculiar blood-related magical protection, to Narcissa Malfoy, the woman (and concerned mother) who ultimately saves Harry's life by lying to Voldemort and thus enables him to complete his heroic mission.

In *Harry Potter* male characters like James, Dumbledore, Snape and indeed Sirius are victims of the dictatorial, patriarchal political system of the Wizarding world, whether this is represented by the Ministry of Magic or by Voldemort, yet (feminist) criticism has ignored this matter.³ They are also victims, as I am arguing, of questionable authorial decisions. The unfairness of Rowling's destruction of Sirius Black in particular is highlighted by a comparison between *Harry Potter* and *Oliver Twist* (1837-9), as I will show. Rowling's series is certainly Dickensian in its extensive cast of memorable secondary characters and, naturally, as an

³ My own position, allow me to clarify, is a profoundly feminist one. My work within the area of Masculinities Studies is based on the idea that we need to distinguish very carefully between masculinity and patriarchy. As I argue, feminist women and anti-patriarchal men should be allies in the common fight against patriarchy, an aberrant system defended by most men but also by many women.

orphan's tale. The connection often established by readers and critics between Harry and Oliver is, nonetheless, misleading since Lord Voldemort, rather than Harry, is "the true inheritor of the Dickensian model" (Washick: website). Oliver's birth in a workhouse and the subsequent death of his abandoned mother, Agnes, are recycled not in Harry's life but in Voldemort's birth in an orphanage (as Tom Malvolio) to the abused witch Merope, who also soon dies. There is, however, an overlooked connection between Harry and Oliver regarding the possibility that a male protector may rescue them from their unhappy orphanhood. Dickens provides his orphan Oliver with an ideal rescuer: John Brownlow, a rich bachelor and his father's best friend. Rowling raises similar hopes for Harry embodied by Sirius Black, another rich bachelor and also the best friend of the boy's deceased father, only to dash them.

Katherine Grimes first noted the links between the "numerous fathers and father figures" (2002: 100) in the two texts: Vernon Dursley connects with the Beadle; Voldemort with Fagin and Bill Sykes; Albus Dumbledore and Sirius Black with Brownlow (whom she wrongly calls Oliver's "great-uncle" though he is no blood relation). Prof. Dumbledore, nonetheless, never contemplates adopting Harry; Sirius is the character most likely to fulfil Brownlow's role. The crucial difference is that whereas by having Brownlow eventually adopt Oliver, Dickens offers an example of successful male single parenting, Rowling dismisses this possibility for reasons that can only respond to a more or less overt androphobia. She is not without support in this dismissal. Critics, though certainly not readers, mostly endorse the authorial decision to prevent Sirius from becoming a Brownlow to Harry on the basis of his personal shortcomings, which appear to be many. Pharr's opinion is representative: "Grabbing for a lost family connection, [Harry] idealizes the *unstable* Sirius Black", who "dies in a brave but *foolish* attempt to protect Harry from Voldemort (...)" (17, my italics). Sirius, a fictional character, is in this way criticized for personality traits which Rowling herself chose for him, arguably seeking to portray Black as the opposite of the stable, rational male protector embodied most famously by Oliver's rescuer, John Brownlow.

In Dickens later novel, *Great Expectations* (1860-1), the success of the father figure, Abel Magwitch, in rescuing the boy Pip from poverty and a miserable life is complicated by his status as a convicted criminal. Rowling imagines a similar complication in Sirius's case but with a much weaker justification, if any at all. Both Magwitch and Sirius are the victims of

abusive justice yet when they escape in search of the boy they obsessively wish to protect they become a hindrance, even jeopardizing the boy's own safety. Hunted by the authorities, they can hardly demand the justice owed to them. Confused, both Pip and Harry show towards their protectors a complex mixture of appreciation, love, frustration and embarrassing aversion.

Magwitch's own actions make him fall prey to the harsh laws of his time, though Dickens uses the convict's inevitable death to question their validity and also to implicitly criticize capital punishment. Sirius, sentenced for life without a trial for a terrorist act he did not commit, deserves much more compassion. Rowling, however, ignores not only the shady political background of the Wizarding world but also the debates on similar acts of injustice, raging in the United Kingdom throughout the 1990s. Sirius's death, though "senseless and preventable" (Tosenberger 2011: 339), is, thus, stubbornly made as inevitable as Magwitch's, although Sirius is innocent of any offence. To cap this ill-advised authorial decision, whereas Dickens has Magwitch die comforted by Pip, Rowling kills Sirius off in such an odd way that her readers find no sense of closure and no comfort for their grief. She eschews not only basic narrative rules but also her implicit responsibility towards her readers, above all the youngest ones.⁴

John Brownlow and Sirius Black: Replacing the Missing Father

1. Brownlow, the good father as rescuer of the orphan Oliver

Secondary characters—too often unfairly overlooked and untheorised—are also essential in the fabric of fiction. In the monographic issue of the journal *Belphégor* exceptionally devoted to them, editor Daniel Couégnas observes that secondary characters are vital in the construction of "les réactions affectives du récepteur" and the "mécanismes parallèles d'identification" (Couégnas 2006: website). The article on *Harry Potter* by Isabelle

⁴ I feel no academic qualms to admit that my own mourning for Sirius Black is not closed and is actually a main motivation behind the writing of this essay. Of course, as an adult, experimented reader I have sufficient tools to process the sad end of this character but this is not always the case with young readers, as my own students explained to me during the monographic elective course on *Harry Potter* that I taught in the Spring of 2014 (BA in English Studies, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, see the syllabus at <http://ddd.uab.cat/record/108876>). Obviously, we can argue that no writer is responsible for the emotional (over)reactions of her readers, regardless of their age. Yet, as I argue further on, Rowling's didactic tone regarding death in *Harry Potter* is seriously compromised by the offhand treatment of Black's death.

Cani within this same issue focuses on Lily and James Potter, yet she finds room to explain that Sirius’s presentation is typical of Rowling’s method to create secondary characters: “elle procède par additions successives à partir du nom”, generating a snowballing effect as more details are added (2006: website). Thus, Sirius, first named in *Philosopher’s Stone* as the owner of the cool motorcycle⁵ which Hagrid borrows to find Harry, eventually emerges as the prisoner of Azkaban, lending his name to the third volume, “après une période de latence” (Cani: website). Dickens, in contrast, favours a detailed first introduction, a vignette designed to impress the reader’s mind with an easy to visualize image. Brownlow is first seen through Oliver’s eyes, when the naïve boy—newly arrived in London and in training by the devious Fagin to become a thief—watches him, about to commit his first and only act of (failed) larceny. We understand who John Brownlow is in just one sentence: “The old gentleman was a very respectable-looking personage, with a powdered head and gold spectacles” (*Oliver Twist* 74) The keywords ‘old,’ ‘gentleman’ and ‘respectable,’ together with his old-fashioned elegance, define Brownlow for good.

Brownlow is also defined by his very Dickensian resistance to unfair (patriarchal) justice and his love for its victims. Disgusted by Judge Fang’s harsh sentencing of Oliver to three-months hard-labour just for trying to steal a book, Brownlow smuggles the boy, who has fainted, out of court, taking him to his “neat house, in a quiet shady street” (86) of a respectable neighbourhood. There his kind housekeeper Mrs. Bedwin, a “motherly old lady” (87), nurses Oliver back to health after he collapses mentally and bodily. The boy’s stay in “Heaven itself” (106) is interrupted when Fagin’s associates (the prostitute Nancy and her pimp Sykes) kidnap Oliver back to the gang of juvenile criminals whom Fagin is training; only the girl’s subsequent regret, based on the memories of her own exploitation as a child by Fagin, allows the ‘old gentleman’ to eventually recover Oliver, who never again loses his protection.

Brownlow is not perfect, as shown by his own inelegant kidnapping of Oliver’s villainous step-brother Monks, yet even this deplorable action is part of his efforts to guarantee the boy’s personal and financial welfare.⁶ Oliver’s young maternal aunt Rose and

⁵ Cool... and magic if it can stretch to accommodate Hagrid’s bulk...

⁶ As a child born out of wedlock, Oliver has no legal rights to his father’s fortune. Even so, Monks decides anyway to get rid of him, aided by Fagin. Their initial plan consists of sinking Oliver into criminality and, thus, make him disappear from respectable society; Monks, though, eventually decides to murder the boy. This

her new husband Harry (a priest) seem the best possible candidates to raise Oliver, yet, by the end of the novel, Brownlow himself finally adopts the boy. He even moves to the newlyweds' village to fulfil his new son's wish to live nearby, thus knitting together "a little society, whose condition approached as nearly to one of perfect happiness" (451) and which also includes Rose's adoptive mother Mrs. Maylie and even Brownlow's best friend Mr-Grimwig. This new-style family and "little society" is what Harry can never enjoy, as a child or teenager, despite the efforts of the friendly Weasleys, due to Sirius's enforced absence in Azkaban. Quite incongruously, this absence is actually used by Rowling to keep her unprotected orphan in the hands of the abusive Dursleys for long years.

Brownlow's generosity is initially presented as simple altruism yet it is soon reinforced by a somewhat melodramatic twist: he turns out to be the oldest, best friend of Oliver's dead father, Edwin Leeford. This friendship starts when the boy Edwin accompanies Brownlow throughout the painful process of seeing his fiancée, Edwin's unnamed sister, fall ill and die. Her untimely death on their projected wedding day leaves Brownlow a "solitary, lonely man", always loyal to her memory, a loyalty also projected in his friendship with Edwin "through all his trials and errors, till he died" (409). The trials are numerous but the errors no doubt too many. Forced by his father to marry a much older rich woman, young Edwin suffers "the protracted anguish of that ill-assorted union" (409), which is only relieved by a scandalous separation (the origin of the grievance felt by his eldest son Edwin, a.k.a. 'Monks'). Subsequently, selfish, irresponsible Edwin seduces virginal Agnes Fleming, either by promising or enacting a false wedding, and makes her pregnant; cast out by her outraged father, Agnes must leave her home. Edwin himself, ignorant of her pregnancy, dies abroad before he can aid her and Agnes soon dies in a workhouse, an anonymous fallen woman, right after Oliver's birth.

Inexplicably, Edwin's ungentlemanly behaviour has been so far skirted by Dickensian scholarship. In contrast, at least two critics have argued that Brownlow's kindness towards Oliver is actually an homage to the boy's victimized mother rather than a by-product of Brownlow's love for his dead best friend. John Brownlow is based on the eponymous real-life man befriended by Dickens, the Secretary (1849-1872) of the Foundling Hospital of

criminal intent allows Brownlow to force Monks to relinquish half of his father's money to Oliver, whose filiation is in this way acknowledged, exactly the opposite of Monks' aims.

London, established in 1741 by philanthropist Thomas Coram.⁷ Brownlow, himself a foundling, had carried out there the charitable task of lending respectability to abandoned babies since 1814. Oliver can, thus, be read as "an ideal philanthropic subject", although "the intensity of Mr. Brownlow's psychic and symbolic investment in Oliver does more than replicate an older set of charitable values" (Taylor 2001: 330). Brownlow's quest to find Oliver's true surname ultimately leads not only to the discovery of his father's name, but also to that of his mother's lost identity, finally "inscribed upon her tomb" (330) with all the honours due, despite the scandal of her being a fallen woman and a single mother. In giving the orphaned boy his own respectable surname and in "reclaiming Oliver's past", the chivalrous Brownlow also rescues "Agnes from oblivion" (Schattschneider 2001: 55). And thus Oliver is blessed with the best possible adoptive father.

2. Sirius Black, the bad father and Harry's impossible rescue

Rowling displaces from Sirius to Severus Snape the chivalrous task of honouring dead Lily, which he does by secretly watching over Harry until his own terrible death.⁸ Although far more decent than Edwin Leeford, Harry's father James Potter does not seem to be, in Rowling's view, respectable enough to deserve a post-humous homage and, so, his sacrifice leaves no legacy, magical or otherwise. Absurdly, not Sirius but Voldemort, then a parasite hosted in Professor Quirrell's welcoming skull, performs the task of telling Harry that James, whom he killed first, "put up a courageous fight..." (*Chamber of Secrets* 213, original ellipsis). Voldemort's subsequent comment, "but your mother needn't have died... she was trying to protect you..." (213, original ellipses), exposes Rowling's confused, biased, even sexist views. Seemingly, the father had to die protecting his family as part of his patriarchal role; the mother's sacrifice, oddly enough, appears to be optional. James's death is, then, not a real sacrifice, as he had no other option; in contrast, Lily's unselfish choice makes her a hero,

⁷ The hospital as such no longer exists, although the Thomas Coram Foundation for Children, a charity devoted to the protection of deprived children, is still very much active. See <http://www.coram.org.uk/>.

⁸ Logically, Snape hates Harry for being the son of his amorous rival, James Potter, but he also loves the boy against instinct for being Lily's son. In view of Snape's difficult personality and of his condition as double agent in the fight against Voldemort it is hard to imagine him as Harry's adoptive father (Hogwarts' teachers, besides, appear to lack families). Rowling, however, prevents any possible positive bond from developing between him and Harry as Snape also falls victim to another extremely cruel death designed to isolate the boy hero. The cases of Albus Dumbledore and Remus Lupin repeat the same pattern.

though it is hard to understand what kind of mother would have allowed Voldemort to kill her baby to spare her.

Back to Sirius Black, it is necessary to stress that the keynote is his characterization is the emphasis laid on the negative aspects of his personality traits and life experiences. Unlike the placid Brownlow, Sirius is a young, cool, "fun loving uncle" (Stypczynski 2013: 104) whose company any child would cherish. Yet, young Sirius, we are told, is also rash and, hence, an irresponsible man; James's choice of Sirius as his best friend is presented as equally reckless.

When Harry first hears about Black he is both an outlaw and an outcast. In *Prisoner of Azkaban* Harry eavesdrops on a conversation among Mme. Rosmerta, Prof. McGonagall and Hagrid, recalling James and Sirius as inseparable best friends, akin to brothers. The downside, according to McGonagall, is that these "exceptionally bright" boys were also the "Ringleaders of their little gang. (...) a pair of troublemakers (...)" (152). Once both are adult, James chooses Sirius to be his best man at his wedding and also Harry's godfather (presumably with Lily's consent). Yet, most of Harry's supporters think that James made a tragic mistake by trusting Sirius to be his family's 'secret-keeper', for Black, it is alleged, disclosed the Potters' hideout to Voldemort. Not even the revelation that another friend of James, Pettigrew, betrayed the Potters and framed Sirius for the anti-Muggle terrorist attack that sent him to Azkaban corrects the negative impression which Rowling conjures. Characteristically, Amy Green sentences that "Sirius's inability to fully think through the ramifications of his actions appears to precipitate the murder of James and Lily" (94), forgetting that the unstoppable Voldemort and his minion Pettigrew are the only culprits.

Green herself realizes, somewhat patronizingly, that, in view of his "long imprisonment and stunted emotional development" (97), Sirius needs "adult guidance and intervention *as much as any troubled adolescent*, but no help arrives" (98, my italics). Rowling's decision to deprive Sirius of assistance is, then, condoned, and the Wizarding community exonerated for his distress. Similarly, Ansón reads Sirius as an outcast from childhood for reasons partly attributable to his upbringing but also, she claims, to his complicated personality. Sirius's opulent home must have been a golden cage for a boy, whose childhood cannot have been happy (Ansón 2008: 66). Black, let's recall, rebels aged 16 against his aristocratic family for supporting Voldemort, seeking refuge in the home of James's sympathetic parents. Despite the fairness of this revolt, and her sympathy for the

handsome, elegant and well-educated Sirius, Ansón calls him "proud and arrogant" (66, my translation). Overlooking also his traumatic captivity, she observes that Sirius's unhappy childhood and rebellious youth result in "irritation, bitterness and spitefulness" (66); his physical decay is "nothing but a reflection of the psychological and emotional decadence of the character" (66). Likewise, and reading *Harry Potter* as primarily Gothic fiction, Gruss interprets Sirius's death as part of "the logic of generic conventions"; he dies, as many characters die in this genre for failing "to confront his past fully" (2011: 44). It is to be wondered why so many critics refuse to feel compassion for the unfortunate Black.

Despite the lay background of her series (magic has a strong presence but not organized religion), Rowling gives Sirius the title of Harry's 'godfather', somehow also equivalent to 'legal guardian'. A godparent's duty consists of taking responsibility for a child's religious education as promised during baptism,⁹ an act which seems incongruous in the context of *Harry Potter's* magical world. The confusion following Voldemort's murder of the Potter couple and Sirius's own imprisonment actually allow Dumbledore to infringe Black's rights as designated godfather/guardian. He makes, thus, the unwise decision to place baby Harry in the reluctant hands of his Muggle aunt Petunia Dursley; this is justified because, following Rowling's matriarchal ideology, she shares Lily's blood and its magic will protect Harry from Voldemort. Petunia is thus considered apt to be Harry's foster mother despite her complete lack of empathy for the boy, whereas Sirius's legal and personal qualifications to become Harry's adoptive father are denied. Although this is not mentioned, it is also implied that a family will offer a better home than a single man¹⁰ to Harry, no matter how vicious this family turns out to be.

More sympathetic than average, Barratt claims that "Though Sirius is as close to a father as Harry knows, and generally gives good advice, Harry often ignores it because he knows of Sirius and James's hijinks in school. This seriously undercuts Sirius's authority" (23).

⁹ Rowling has explained that Harry's christening was a hurried affair as Voldemort was at large; there was no time to seek a godmother and Sirius's only presence had to make do. See the transcript of the question-and-answer session at the Edinburgh Book Festival, 2004, <http://www.accio-quote.org/articles/2004/0804-ebf.htm>.

¹⁰ Sirius, imprisoned aged 25, was still single since, according to Rowling, he "was too busy being a big rebel to get married" (see: <http://www.mugglenet.com/jkrebfs.html>). As MacDonald notes (2006: 29, 30), whereas fan fiction frequently focuses on gay pairings (countless examples of slash fiction pair Sirius with Remus Lupin), homosexuality is absent from the *Harry Potter* series. Rowling's outing of Dumbledore as gay once the series was over appears to be ambiguously homophobic, as she could have easily chosen to characterize the old wizard as homosexual if she had so wished. The same, I believe, applies to Sirius. It makes more sense, though, to see dashing Sirius's lack of girlfriends as part his characterization as an immature, adultescent man.

Harry's accidental access to Snape's memories of being bullied by James and his gang in *Order of the Phoenix* discloses an ugly reality which radically changes the boy's perception of his father and his friends. When Harry confronts Sirius and Remus about their intolerable behaviour, their easy-going, even amused, attitude is simply not right. They plea not guilty on different grounds: they were only 15 (Harry's own age), cool James hated the Dark Arts personified by uncool Snape, he did it to impress Lily... Sirius grants that he is not proud of their behaviour; also, that he and James were "sometimes arrogant little berks" and "idiots" (590), yet this is not sufficient. Harry ends the conversation declaring that "I just never thought I'd feel sorry for Snape" (590) and his trusting admiration for Sirius crumples to dust—possibly because Rowling herself finds little to admire in Sirius. He is "kind of on the edge (...), a little bit of a loose cannon" and has "some quite glaring flaws"; he is, in short "a case of arrested development", as can be seen, she points out, from his wanting "a mate from Harry" when "what Harry craves is a father". Sirius, Rowling sentences, "wasn't equipped to give him that" (all quotes in Anelli and Spartz 2005: web). In the same interview, she claims that Sirius "was absolutely unhinged by James's death", suggesting with the word 'unhinged' a mental imbalance manifested already before his long years in Azkaban (and which, by way, would have made Sirius ineligible to be Harry's legal guardian).

Rowling even uses Hermione and Molly Weasley as her delegates in the text not only to separate Harry from Sirius but also to blame the latter for his own death. Molly's role is that of establishing that Sirius "is not thinking of Harry's best interests—as a parental figure should" (Behr 2005: 118). John Brownlow's open acknowledgement that he cares for Oliver because he still loves his father Edwin constitutes the main foundation for his adoptive fatherhood. Yet throughout *Order of the Phoenix*, Sirius's love for Harry is pathologized as a sick identification of his lost best friend with his orphan. A key conversation or, rather, quarrel, in this novel grants Molly authority over Sirius, despite appearances, and is used as a first step to convince readers that Black is expendable. He demands that Harry, then 15, be fully informed of the details regarding Voldemort's return whereas Molly resists any disclosure, claiming that Harry is too young. "It's not down to you to decide what's good for Harry!" (83), she yells at Sirius, forgetting that he is the boy's guardian. The quarrel escalates with the contenders disputing whether Harry is a child or an adult. Molly attacks then Sirius's weakest spot:

'He's not James, Sirius!'
 'I'm perfectly clear who he is, thanks, Molly', said Sirius coldly.
 'I'm not sure you are!' said Mrs. Weasley. 'Sometimes, the way you talk about him, it's as though you think you've got your best friend back!'
 'What's wrong with that?' said Harry.
 'What's wrong, Harry, is that you are not your father, however much you might look like him!' said Mrs. Weasley, her eyes still boring into Sirius. (*Order of the Phoenix* 83)

Molly insists that she speaks as "as someone who has Harry's best interests at heart", which prompts Sirius to counterattack:

'He's not your son', said Sirius quietly.
 'He's as good as', said Mrs. Weasley fiercely. 'Who else has he got?'
 'He's got me!'
 'Yes', said Mrs. Weasley, her lip curling, 'the thing is, it's been rather difficult for you to look after him while you've been locked up in Azkaban, hasn't it?' (83)

Molly's ugly jab gets no reply from wounded Sirius and it is up to Lupin to remind her that "you're not the only person at this table who cares about Harry" (83). Harry feels "touched by what she had said about his being as good as a son" but also "impatient with her mollycoddling. Sirius was right, he was not a child" (83).

Although Molly seems to have been defeated, nonetheless Harry's "hopes that he might be able to live a bachelor's life with his godfather" (Gallardo and Smith 2009: 103) are ruthlessly destroyed. The potential male bonding is curtailed by Hermione's unusually unfeeling hints that Sirius, "cooped up in Grimmauld Place" is "really frustrated at how little he can do where he is..." (*Order of the Phoenix* 335, original ellipsis). The last glimpse we get of Sirius presents him, in the narrator's voice, "looking anxious. He was unshaven and still in his day clothes" with a "whiff of stale drink about him" (421). He soon dies, whereas Molly survives to become Harry's mother... in-law when he eventually marries Ginny Weasley. Regrettably, Harry is eventually convinced of Sirius's unsuitability to play a "positive, fatherly role model" (Green 2008: 89). When Lupin and Tonks choose Harry to be their baby's godfather, he wonders quite gratuitously whether he will be "as reckless a godfather to Teddy Lupin as Sirius Black had been to him" (*Deathly Hallows* 418).

As if Molly's and Hermione's undermining of Black's person did not suffice, Rowling offers yet another (bizarre) justification for Sirius's death: his troubled relationship with the house elves. "It is important for the interpretation of the whole series", Fenske observes, "that Sirius dies because he is proud, inhumane and treats his inferiors badly" (2008: 217). This chilling view connects with a comment which Sirius makes in *Goblet of Fire* during the

episode when it is revealed that Bartemius Crouch Sr. (incidentally, the Ministry of Magic high officer who sent Black to Azkaban) is ill-treating his female house elf Winky. Hermione, always sensitive to the barbaric treatment which house elves meet, is scandalized; Ron, however, downplays her indignation. Sirius claims then that "She's got the measure of Crouch better than you have, Ron. If you want to know what a man's like, take a good look at how he treats his inferiors, not his equals" (*Goblet of Fire* 571). These words backfire dramatically against Black when, tired of the constant insults he receives from his own house elf Kreacher, Sirius loses his temper and threatens (not truly intending it) to murder him. Hoping that Sirius will free Kreacher, which he cannot do as the elf would reveal the secrets of the Order of the Phoenix, Hermione reminds Black that the elf is "not right in the head" (102). Sirius concurs since Kreacher has been, in his words, "alone too long" (*Order of the Phoenix* 102)—exactly the same years Black has spent at Azkaban. "Although troublesome and spiteful, Kreacher clings precariously to the last shreds of his sanity", Green writes, "yet Sirius refuses to exhibit the slightest hint of compassion" (2008: 95). Although troublesome and spiteful, we might paraphrase, Sirius clings precariously to the last shreds of his Azkaban-impaired sanity, yet Rowling refuses to exhibit the slightest hint of compassion. Kreacher's spiteful betrayal of Sirius to Voldemort finally sends Harry's godfather, the person who loves him most at that stage of his life, to face death. Yet, we are asked to pity the house elf, not the man. Thinking back to Oliver and John Brownlow, it is easy to see that this is a grotesque, morally monstrous demand.

Abel Magwitch and Sirius Black: The Complex Case of the Tainted Protector

1. Abel Magwitch, learning compassion for the convict

Since it is easy to imagine an alternative plot in which Sirius survives to participate in Harry's 'little society' and adult life—as unlike Dumbledore or Snape he is irrelevant to Voldemort—understandably, many readers have resisted Sirius's death. To curb down this resistance, Rowling has adopted two strategies: one, claiming that she is also distressed by Black's death; the other, arguing that the plot requires his demise. Thus, Rowling declared

that she was truly "upset" and in tears after writing the scene of Sirius's end; when her concerned husband advised her to just avoid killing any character, she replied: "You are writing children's books, you need to be a ruthless killer" (BBC News 2003: website). Plagued by complaints from many grieving readers who loved Black as their favourite character, she explains that his death "wasn't arbitrary (...). It is more satisfying I think for the reader if the hero has to go on alone and to give him too much support makes his job too easy, sorry" (CBBC Newsround 2005: website). Both claims are very easy to discount.

Gibson and Zaidman's assertion that "dying is a most important topic in children's literature and should not be avoided as too morbid or too painful" (1991: 233) is hard to dispute. Rowling's defence of 'ruthlessness' in killing characters, however, is debatable, considering the psychological harm that can be inflicted on young children (just think of the death of Bambi's mother). At any rate, I am not arguing here that no character should die in *Harry Potter*; I am making, rather, the point that Sirius Black's death feels completely arbitrary and mismanaged. Regarding Rowling's second argument, certainly many characters die in her series yet she sees no need to kill Harry's closest allies Hermione and Ron, not even secondary characters Luna Lovegood and Neville Longbottom. As I have repeatedly noted, the characters targeted by the author for termination are, specifically, Harry's male adult protectors. Perhaps seeing through Rowling's ruse from another angle, Saxena points out in relation to Sirius that "the dashing and reckless godfather with a tragic past, often threatens to overshadow Harry" (2012: 66), hence the convenience of his death. Also, his demise frees Harry from the obligation "to be an image of his father" (126), a man who appears to have been more naturally charismatic than his rather shy son.

In *Great Expectations* the death of the male protector can be read as a rite of passage into (male) adulthood. The orphan Pip first meets Abel Magwitch aged 6 and finally learns aged 23 that he is the "undesirable fairy godfather" (Meckier 2002: 6) who has enacted his transformation into a gentleman. Dickens's escaped convict is indeed "the tragicomic composite of Oliver's two mentors, Brownlow and Fagin, polarities that take turns governing him" (Meckier: 22). These two novels also connect through the deaths of Fagin (executed in the gallows) and Magwitch, whose timely death saves him from a public hanging. Oliver, not yet 12, fails to convince the Jewish Fagin to ask the Christian God for forgiveness in his visit to the condemned man's cell, accompanied by Brownlow. Pip is old enough to understand how the unfair application of the law condemns Magwitch, a dispossessed orphan, from

birth; the convict even seems to embody what Oliver would have become without Brownlow's help. Pip's pity makes him hope that the injuries which Magwitch sustains when he kills in self-defence his arch-enemy Compeyson will end his benefactor's life before the hangman acts. As Raina asserts, "the willed union between Pip and Magwitch—that is, between an Oliver made deeply conscious (...) and a redeemed Fagin" is the "apotheosis that encapsulates the totality of Dickens' development" (1986: 126).

Magwitch and Sirius overlap mostly in the sub-plot of how their escape upsets the boy each intends to protect. Their circumstances are different, yet both are outcasts seeking a second chance by becoming a second father to an orphaned boy. In Magwitch's own words, his life before being transported to Australia was "In jail and out of jail, in jail and out of jail, in jail and out of jail" (*Great Expectations* 346). While his upper-class background fails to save Sirius from becoming the prisoner of a political system too afraid of Voldemort to act rationally, Magwitch is victimized by "a class-bound criminal justice system which favours the aristocratic villain Compeyson" (Reid 2004: 61), his criminal instigator. Committed "for felony, on a charge of putting stolen notes in circulation" (350), the judge sentences Compeyson to just seven years, Magwitch to fourteen. Enraged, Magwitch chases Compeyson when he tries to escape and tries to murder him, thus condemning himself to perpetual exile.

Sirius, also condemned for life, is locked up in sinister Azkaban. Magwitch, in contrast, is transported and eventually liberated to start a second life as "sheep-farmer, stock-breeder, other trades besides" in Australia, where, as he tells Pip, he has done "wonderfully well" (317). Set in the 1830s, when returned convicts faced the death penalty, *Great Expectations* was serialized in 1860-1, only eight years before the practice of transporting convicts to Australia reached its end, after three years of being only sporadically applied. Dickens's novel may certainly be read as part of the social trend to demonize the returned convict, though his position appears to be rather ambiguous. Magwitch returns because not content enough with thanking the child Pip for his help during Compeyson's chase by making him a gentleman, Magwitch needs to be acknowledged (Bowlby 2013: 121). As Reid notes, "Magwitch's return confounds and undermines supposedly fixed hierarchies of difference" between the metropolis and the colonies (2004: 59), a hierarchy on which Dickens avoids pronouncing himself directly. Yet, in my view, despite Pip's evident disgust with prison and his having "internalized the discourse that disciplinary society promotes"

(Alber 2007: 82), Magwitch's death as he awaits execution does not appear to be just punishment for the rogue convict but a final escape from barbaric justice. Although Magwitch fails to notice his reaction, initially, the adult, snobbish Pip feels deep repugnance for his benefactor but soon "he adopts as his father this man who has unilaterally made him more-than-son" (Bowlby: 120). This positive change is produced when Pip understands that Magwitch is paying a too high price for the simple wish to see him; far from diminishing, his affection for the convict increases as Pip faces the death of his benefactor, realizing in the process the appalling role the law plays in it.

The comparison between *Great Expectations* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is common in Dickensian criticism, which often debates whether Magwitch is "a violent monster whose evil corrupts the social ideal ostensibly embodied by Compeyson" (Crawford 1988: 628) or, rather, a victim of "the structure of the English class system" (628), against which Magwitch takes revenge by turning Pip into a gentleman. In a famous passage Pip compares himself with both Victor Frankenstein and his monster, also embodied by Magwitch: "The imaginary student pursued by the misshapen creature he had impiously made, was not more wretched than I, pursued by the creature who had made me, and recoiling from him with a stronger repulsion, the more he admired me and the fonder he was of me" (333). In Dickens' world, however, "the human spirit retains its capacity for good" and Magwitch, "nurtured by memories of Pip's charity" is able to endure the trauma of his exile (Crawford 628), finding comfort in his memory of the little boy who was kind to him seventeen years before. Likewise, Sirius endures his hardships and keeps his sanity at Azkaban by finding solace in thinking of James's orphan. Sirius later rationalizes to Harry that he kept his sanity knowing he was innocent: "That wasn't a happy thought, so the Dementors couldn't suck it out of me..." (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 272, original ellipsis). One way or another, Sirius does manage to conceal the happy memory of the little orphan Harry and this fills up his loneliness. Ultimately, nonetheless, both Pip and Harry grow uncomfortable with their male protectors—with an important difference. Sirius's degradation mortifies Harry to the point that he makes no real attempt to help him. The older Pip, "embarrassed-for himself, for the man whose death he wants to ease, for the social expectations that victimized them both" (Stein 1988: 112), stays, conversely, loyally by Magwitch's side. Unlike Harry, who never asks the Ministry of Magic to grant Sirius a post-humous reprieve, Pip does all he can, petitioning in vain the authorities as he lacks "influential connections" (Stein:

106). Once Magwitch is sentenced, Pip recalls, he takes no rest for days "but was wholly absorbed in these appeals" (458). His last kindness is to remain with Magwitch until he dies. Harry, who occupies a much stronger position before and after defeating Voldemort, simply does nothing to redress the appalling injustice committed against his godfather.

An early psychoanalytical reading by Dessner suggests that Pip unconsciously blames his father for the death of his mother and most of his siblings, and for his own abandonment in the care of his elder sister, Mrs. Gargery, a far more vicious foster mother than Harry's Aunt Petunia. As Dessner argues, Pip feels guilty about this secret hatred and finds in Magwitch the other father who "will love and punish him, and whom the boy can love and punish" (1976: 439). Entangled in Magwitch's suicidal decision to return, Pip loses his status as a gentleman when the convict's fortune is seized by justice; he also loses Estella, the woman he loves and Magwitch's own secret daughter (the convict thought she had died). The happy possibility that Pip might marry her and enjoy the company of a surviving Magwitch pardoned by justice as his father-in-law is not contemplated. Pip is so severely damaged by the events that not even the alternative happy end which Dickens wrote to please readers offers some hope for the couple (also in view of Estella's suffering as a battered wife, recently widowed). The main didactic and ethical lesson that *Great Expectations* teaches the reader is then that, as happens to Pip, we must learn to feel compassion for the man unfairly condemned by social circumstance and by unjust laws. Dickens's novel also contains a serious warning about the impossibility of overcoming the deepest traumas of life even in the happiest circumstances.

2. Sirius Black, without compassion

Rowling does allow Harry to become a happy husband and father, surrounded by sons whose names symbolically revive his dead male protectors: James Sirius and Albus Severus. His happiness is in part possible because Sirius's return does not damage Harry in the deep way that Magwitch's hurts Pip, as Rowling downplays the impact of Black's death on the mind of his godson (this also applies to Harry's terrifying confrontation with Voldemort, which would logically traumatize any young person). Despite his ambiguous tone, Dickens clearly bore a grudge against the social and judicial system that condemned men like Magwitch from birth, which is why the snobbish Pip learns the hard way to be a

compassionate man, a message the author transmits to his readers. Rowling, in contrast, does not teach us compassion and even neglects to condemn the judicial system that destroys Sirius's life, directly and indirectly.

Sirius is sent to Azkaban "without a trial" (*Goblet of Fire* 572) by Barty Crouch Sr., then head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, and not even Voldemort's supporter. The abuse of power that ruins Sirius's life is, then, part of the Wizarding world's habitual dictatorial, Orwellian politics, though Black grants that Voldemort's first attempt to seize power generated much confusion. As he adds, "Crouch fought violence with violence, and authorized the use of the Unforgivable Curses" (*Goblet of Fire* 572), that is, of torture, against the many political prisoners. As Katz concludes, "when political authority is the agent of brutality and terror, innocence no longer signifies a possibility for redemption or liberation" (2003: 202). In the *Harry Potter* novels, Chevalier notes, "the law is almost always abused" (2005: 406). By having Azkaban's guards, the ghastly Dementors, deprive prisoners of any happy thoughts, Rowling imagines Azkaban not "as a place of reform" but as a backward "holding tank for vice" (406), in the style of eighteenth-century prisons.

Sirius's presentation as a dangerous murderer on the run and Harry's first terrifying meeting with him echo the child Pip and Magwitch; if caught, though, Sirius would not be executed but subjected to the Dementors' dreadful 'kiss'; this leaves prisoners, as Lupin explains, "an empty shell" (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 83) with no soul. Black decides to escape specifically when he has an intuition that Pettigrew is getting closer to Harry; his concern for the boy's well-being gives him the mental strength he needs to flee using his magical abilities. After escaping, Sirius leads throughout *Goblet of Fire* a sorry clandestine existence, using his Animagus powers to survive mostly as a dog, even hunting and eating animals; his eyes keep throughout this time "that deadened, haunted look" (363). Rowling, however, pays no attention to Sirius's welfare while he struggles for about one year to protect Harry. In *Order of the Phoenix* the psychological consequences of his Azkaban captivity and of his new miserable existence finally surface during Black's domestic imprisonment (he is still sought after by the Ministry, then beginning to fall under Voldemort's command).

Interestingly, the portrait that Rowling gives of Sirius in *Order of Phoenix* coincides with the evidence which Adrian Grounds found in the cases of the male victims of wrongful conviction. What is missing is the compassion that ill Sirius deserves—and a treatment, magical or otherwise. Grounds published in 2004 a landmark study of the psychological

consequences of miscarried justice, based on the infamous cases of the 'Guildford Four' and the 'Birmingham Six', all convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment for IRA terrorist attacks which they had not committed. In 1989, after fifteen years imprisonment, the 'Guildford Four' were released when the Court of Appeal found that "they had been convicted on the basis of uncorroborated and coerced confessions" (Grounds: 166); a similar decision freed the 'Birmingham Six' in 1991. This led to "a major review of the English criminal justice system by a Royal Commission" (166) in 1993, resulting in the 'Criminal Appeal Act' (1995) and the subsequent establishment of the Criminal Cases Review Commission. The CCRC, covering England, Wales and Northern Ireland (with a separate commission for Scotland) "received over 4,000 applications" in five years (167), three quarters of which succeeded. The errors made in judging Irish 'terrorist' cases generated "the largest catalogue of contemporary miscarriages" (Walker and McCartney 2010: 191); at least, though, a mechanism protecting some of the wrongfully convicted was made available. It is hard to understand how all this escaped Rowling's attention, shaping already at the time her series and thus also imagining Azkaban and its inmates.

Grounds's study of eighteen wrongfully imprisoned men, with no previous mental health problems, revealed that they had suffered serious psychological damage. "Their average age on entry to prison was 28, and their average age on release was 38" (2004: 168), roughly the same ages that bracket Sirius's stay in Azkaban (25 to 37). Grounds claims that they suffered post-traumatic stress disorder and other paranoiac or panic disorders. Depression plagued the men ill-treated by justice and some used "alcohol to try to blot [it] out" (169). Other symptoms included mood swings making them "very difficult to live with" (169); like most long-term prisoners, these men felt "psychologically the age they had been on entry to prison" (172). Grounds was "left with a strong clinical impression of irreversible damage that could not be substantially remedied" (174), though he stresses that, if helped, these men would be able to "cope with their grief" and gain "a better level of understanding of their difficulties" (174). Black clearly presents signs of the same 'irreversible damage', increased by his clandestine existence. Nobody in his circle of friends, however, does anything to help him, not even Harry. It could be argued that he is too young and that, anyway, a series addressed to child readers and set in a magical world need not be absolutely realistic regarding the psychology of characters. Actually, it seems quite clear that the accurate representation of Harry's personality is one of Rowling's best achievements.

Likewise, the representation of Black's personality is also exact, given the circumstances of his life. What I am criticizing here, therefore, is not Rowling's characterization of Sirius but her lack of compassion and how this forces Harry to act out of character.

The clearest instance of Rowling's pitilessness is Sirius's inexplicable death. Thanks to Kreacher's treachery, Voldemort manages to lure several members of the Order of the Phoenix and Harry's gang of friends into the Ministry of Magic, where a trap has been laid for them. In the ensuing battle, Sirius is hit by a hex thrown by his cousin Bellatrix, Voldemort's supporter and, incidentally, an Azkaban escapee seriously unhinged by her imprisonment. The impact sends Sirius "through the ragged veil hanging from the arch" (710) of a mysterious gate which seems to serve the only purpose of being there to engulf him. Harry sees "the look of mingled fear and surprise on his godfather's wasted, once-handsome face as he fell through the ancient doorway and disappeared behind the veil, which fluttered for a moment as though in a high wind, then fell back into place" (*Order of the Phoenix* 710). Harry, like most readers, expected Sirius to cross the doorway back to life—in vain. Sirius does re-appear briefly in *Deathly Hallows* when Harry meets his beloved dead ones before facing Voldemort and his own impending death. Harry asks his godfather a "childish question" indeed: "Does it hurt?" Sirius calms him: "Dying? Not at all. (...) Quicker and easier than falling asleep" (560). It is hard to say which of the two authorial decisions is more questionable: bringing back Sirius nonchalantly with no comment about his missing body, or telling young readers that death does not hurt.

"Rowling's representations of child and adolescent grief experiences are accurate and insightful", Taub and Servaty (2003: 24) inform us. Teen Harry is "actively reluctant to discuss his grief" (26), displaying an "instrumental pattern" (27) consisting of doing actively instead of mourning passively. In his renowned essay "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) Freud explains that mourning requires "the verdict of reality that the object no longer exists"; this way, the ego "is persuaded by the sum of the narcissistic satisfactions it derives from being alive to sever its attachment to the object that has been abolished" (255). In other words, mourning is a selfish process of psychological survival and Harry acts normally by overcoming Black's death rather quickly.

Two main objections, however, can be made: one, a successful process of mourning requires specific funeral rituals, unworkable in Sirius's case as his body is missing; two, grief is a completely different process when the child or teenager witnesses a violent death, as

Harry does (also in Dumbledore's case). "As an embodied sensation, grief desires a body to mourn", Baptist writes (2010: 299). This is why WWI, the Nazi death camps, the military dictatorships in Chile and Argentina and the 9/11¹¹ attacks are so hard to process, individually and collectively: "With so many absent bodies, the bereaved were denied the crucial corpse over which to care and to lament, through which to solidify the severance between the living and the dead" (301). In Rowling's series, Cedric Diggory and Albus Dumbledore are given funerals; Harry even buries the elf Dobby with his own hands. Nothing, however, is done to honour Sirius. The "peculiar cruelty of the not-known, the forever uncertain" (Morrissey and Davis 2007: 207) is also left unaddressed as no explanation is provided for how exactly Sirius dies. Harry asks resident Hogwarts spectre Nearly-Headless Nick whether his godfather can return as a ghost but he just gets a weak explanation that, having accepted death, Black "will have... gone on" (*Order of the Phoenix* 785, original ellipsis). It is not clarified why Nick assumes that Sirius has accepted death.

The brevity of Harry's mourning for Sirius may be defensible, of course, on the grounds that he is not the boy's parent. Dumbledore, however, tells a furious Harry that his rage is justified since he has lost mother, father and "the closest thing to a parent you have ever known" (*Order of the Phoenix* 726). Unrealistically, nonetheless, Harry's anger and pain last only for a few months. Miraculously, Harry controls his grief on his own, with no professional psychological (or magical) aid, in quite a short time and when he is, besides, at the Dursleys and mentally distressed after learning from Dumbledore himself that he must kill Voldemort or die. By the beginning of *Half-Blood Prince*, a wary, pragmatic Dumbledore carefully tests the depth of Harry's grief, finding, as he hopes, that it has noticeably subsided. Harry rationalizes that "I can't shut myself away or—or crack up. Sirius wouldn't have wanted that, would he? And anyway, life's too short. (...) It could be me next, couldn't it?" (77). Dumbledore rewards him with "an approving pat" on the back: "Spoken both like your mother and father's son and Sirius's true godson!" (78).

Harry's upbeat mood in this scene, nevertheless, is not consistent with the findings in Eth and Pynoos's pioneering article "Children Who Witness the Homicide of a Parent"

¹¹ Jonathan Safran Foer's remarkable novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) deals beautifully with the complex process of mourning that nine-year-old Oskar faces when his father disappears, a victim of the terrorist attack against New York's Twin Towers in 2001. Foer's treatment of the delicate subject is far more realistic and accurate than Rowling's.

(1994). Witnessing a violent death, they write "results in a particular variety of juvenile post-traumatic stress disorder" and impairs grief work "as the horror over the mode of death disrupts thoughts about the deceased" (n.p. online version). They claim that "[a]t the core of the trauma is the intrusive, dysphoric memory of the sight of the violence when lethal physical harm was inflicted (...)". PTSD is further fuelled by the idea that the lost parent died because of the actions of another person. This is not incompatible with the impression that the victim played a role "in precipitating the crime"; in some cases the child blames him or herself for failing "to prevent the crime, or for having provoked the killing by their own behaviour". Guilt and trauma frequently hasten "the adolescent's premature entrance into adulthood". All this fits Harry's case. Yet, despite acting cranky and upset, he has neither the time nor a chance to engage in the antisocial behaviour which most real teens in his situation adopt. Harry, then, unlike most children and teenagers who witness a parent's violent death, safely consigns Sirius to memory with no enduring trauma.

Rowling, then, avoids plunging Harry into the depression that grips Pip in *Great Expectations* but she also distorts the process by which Harry should have naturally shown pity and compassion for his godfather, demanding in addition a public funeral and an apology from the Ministry of Magic. The mourning, however, continues for the young and not so young readers, who carry the burden of their own silenced pity and compassion. There is, in short, a mismatch between the intradiagetic and the extradiagetic process of mourning for Sirius. Within the text, grief is soon controlled and Harry, the only person truly affected by Sirius's death, quickly moves on. In contrast, my discussion of Sirius's Dickensian characterization and of his baffling death has been aimed at showing how deeply Rowling mismanages extradiagetic grief. Quite obviously, characters are *not* people, yet readers do suffer for their loss, particularly when this loss is very imperfectly justified. Readers, Markell and Markell write, "may be grief-stricken and confused over the loss of Sirius. He is a complicated character who is both caring and angry. Readers may feel, like Harry, that they will now never completely understand Sirius, and so their grief is complicated by feelings of the injustice of his early death" (2008: 60).

Conclusions: Still mourning Sirius Black

Besides noting the latent androphobia of the *Harry Potter* series, the main objections I have presented here against Rowling's mishandling of her readers' grief over Black refer first, to his unnecessary death; second, to "the lack of closure for the grieving survivors that accompanies the absence of a corpse" (Tanner 2006: 224) in view of Sirius's strange disappearance; third, to her unsympathetic neglect, as she offers no funeral rites for Sirius to comfort both Harry and the readers.

Regarding the Dickensian models available to Rowling for inspiration, John Brownlow's happy parental relationship with Oliver shows that the author could have relied on this example to build an equally happy bond between Sirius and Harry, turning Black into Harry's main adult support in the final segment of his struggle against Voldemort and in his adult life. If we object that Sirius's psychological condition makes him unsuitable to adopt Harry in the same way that Magwitch's criminal past embarrasses Pip, then we become Rowling's accomplices in her unacceptable treatment of the (male) victims of (patriarchal) injustice. Whereas Dickens teaches us compassion towards men like Magwitch through younger men like Pip, Rowling insistently blames Sirius for his sad life and even for his shocking death, without realizing that in the process Harry is negatively characterized as a cold, unfeeling young man who even keeps a tainted, ambiguous memory of who his godfather really was.

Finally, Rowling exhibits a totally objectionable irresponsibility in seeking no redress at all for Sirius's personal and political victimization,¹² particularly if we take into account, as child readers are quick to understand, that Sirius's only aim in life is to love and help Harry. No child who sympathizes or identifies with Harry and who values Sirius's enormous generosity—which is how Rowling characterizes him—can then easily accept his dismal degradation and his deplorable, untimely death. Rowling's decision to defend her urge to be a 'ruthless killer' overlooks her readers' grief for Sirius's death and denies the possibility that

¹² As a Spanish citizen appalled by the horrors suffered by the political prisoners under Francisco Franco's military dictatorial regime (1939-1975) and by the tragic fate of the many persons executed during the Civil War (1936-39)—victims cruelly 'disappeared' by their murderers, including poet Federico García Lorca among them—I feel scandalized and indignant by how Rowling avoids teaching young readers that justice must be offered to those whose lives are ruined arbitrarily for political reasons. The missing, besides, must always be honoured, as the only possible way to put an end to mourning. Whether this is academically valid or not, here is my main motivation indeed to discuss Sirius Black's sad case.

a (single) man can be an apt parent on grounds that can only be called androphobic. These are limits of her world-wide popular series and of her authorial perceptiveness.

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